critical digest

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

Future New York Openings

Wish You Were Here-Imperial, 6/25/52. Leland Hayward and Joshua Logan present new musical comedy by Logan and Arthur Kober, with music and lyrics by Harold Rome. Mardi Bayne, Jack Cassidy, Sheila Bond, Paul Valentine featured in cast...A Night in Venice-Jones Beach Stadium, 6/26/52. Mike Todd's super outdoor production of new version of Johann Strauss operetta sponsored by NY State Park Commission. Cast will include Martha Errolle, Gloria Gilbert, Thomas Hayward, Jack Russell and Rosita Royce.

Digests of Current Reviews

Sunday Breakfast-Coronet, 5/26/52. ANTA's final subscription production of season didn't receive any encouragement from daily reviewers who covered second night because of conflict with First Lady opening. Except for fact that limited run showing of first efforts of Emery Rubio and Miriam Balf may help the authors, critics could find little to praise. Jada Rowland, age 9, was applauded by most, while remainder of cast, Anthony Ross, Margaret Feury, Douglas Watson and Cloris Leachman were victims of poor writing jobs. Atkinson, Times, suggested that all child actors seem to be geniuses these days. The play, he stated, doesn't have a solid foundation, but it does work its way up to a poignant situation that expresses one aspect of truth. Kerr, Herald Tribune, feared the grinding anguish killed any small home truths apparent. Chapman, News, tabbed it as an earnest, but unimportant little play, while Coleman, Mirror, felt the short play seemed like a long one. Watts, Post, points out to authors that realism alone doesn't make a play interesting. The situation presented is a fine beginning for a play, but not enough for a play itself. Maybe it wasn't the worst, noted Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun, but play wins prize as the most unpleasant of season. Many also blamed director Stella Adler for making cast over-act from the very first scene.

First Lady-City Center, 5/26/52. Weekly appraisers who filed reports on NY City Theatre company's final limited run spring production split on timeliness of Katharine Dayton-George S.Kaufman 1935 script. Though all welcomed Helen Gahagan back, Hobe, Variety, felt her performance was too uneven to be satisfactory. All agreed on superb performance by Edna Best. Francis, Billboard, raved. Script in no way was dated, he commented, remaining crisp and timely. Trade paper reviewer hoped production could be moved downtown intact. Hobe, Variety, turned thumbs down because he found what should have been a natural turned out to be a dated egg, poorly done. Staging by David Alexander was heavy-handed, while many of the smaller parts were badly miscast. Entire production made original with Jane Cowl seem much better. Keating, Cue, okayed production as the closing number of the City Center's spring comedy festival, but taken by itself it came off as a surprisingly mechanical play. WCBS Bill Leonard thought nomination acceptance scene was funny enough to carry the whole evening.

Hits Revisited

Stalag 17 is still good, exciting theatre and boisterous comedy, Sheaffer, Eagle, reports. Cast, half of which are new replacements, is pretty good. Though critic liked Robert Strauss better than George Tobias in part of "Stosh."...Top Banana remains a grand package of clean, low-down fun, comments Francis, Billboard. Phil Silvers, who has added business to his role, is better than on opening night. Other cast members remain on their toes, he noted.

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' Cumulative NYC Ratings '

D - Daily W - Weekly M - Monthly B - Broadcast

DT - NY Times	DJC - Journal of Commerce	WCM - Chr. Science Monitor
DH - NY Herald Tribune	DWJ - Wall St. Journal	WC - Commonweal
DN - NY News	DWW - Women's Wear	WCU - Cue
DM - NY Mirror	WB - Billboard	WN - Nation
DC - NY Compass	WV - Variety	WNR - New Republic
DP - NY Post	WCD - Critical Digest	WNS - Newsweek
DJ - NY Journal American	WGN - George Jean Nathan	WNY - New Yorker
DW - NY World Tele-Sun	WWM - Ward Morehouse	WSR - Saturday Review
DB - Brooklyn Eagle	BC - WCBS Bill Leonard	WT - Time
DL - L.I.Press	BL - New Leader-WEVD	MP - Park East

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them not if they think they will be hits. "So-so" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

THE FOURPOSTER-10/24/51	PROS: 19	Con: DH DP WGM WWM BL WC WNY None: DWJ WN WSR
GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50	PROS: 29	Con: WN
I AM A CAMERA-11/28/51	PROS: 22	Con: DN DJ WCM WNR WN So-So: DT
THE KING AND I-3/29/51	PROS: 29	Con: WN
THE MALE ANIMAL-4/30/52	PROS: 22	None: WGN WC WN MP
THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51	PROS: 26	Con: WCD WGN None: WN MP
MRS. McTHING-2/20/52	PROS: 20	Con: DM DJ BC DL WNR WNY WSR WT
NEW FACES OF 1952-5/16/52	PROS: 24	Con: DP WT WGN None: WN WWR MP
PAINT YOUR WAGON-11/10/51	PROS: 21	Con: DH DP DJ WV WWM BC WC None: BL WWR WSR
PAL JOEY-1/3/52	PROS: 28	Con: BL None: WNR
POINT OF NO RETURN-12/13/51	PROS: 25	Con: DW BL WN WNR WT
SOUTH PACIFIC-4/7/49	PROS: 29	Con: WT
STALAG 17-5/8/51	PROS: 22	Con: DM WCD BL WCU WNY So-So: DN
THREE WISHES FOR JAMIE-3/21/52	PROS: 18	Con: DP DJ WCU WT BC WCM WSR None: WWM WN WNR MP
TOP BANANA-11/1/51	PROS: 23	Con: DP DJ BL None: WCM WN WWR WSR

' Off Broadway '

Summer and Smoke, current Circle in Square production which closes June 29, will pay Saturday matinees during June...Punch Opera will offer summer season at Metropolitan-Duane Auditorium, 200 West 13th St...The Rivals will be repeated week ends at Provincetown...Mountebanks will produce Dr.Jekyll and Mr. Hyde week ends at Amato with midnight curtains...Irwin Rose has rented Circle in Square for summer and will produce Daniel Polis' Fortress of Glass...Old Acquaintance staged at Penthouse Dance and Drama Theatre, 421 West 145th, June 9-21...Edward Safranski named musical director for Theatre de Lys Frankie and Johnny...Cherry Lane may be torn down shortly, predicts Walker, News...Living Theatre's production of Faustina modern Roman play by Hawkins, WT&S, Shanley, Times, and Pollock, Compass. Ponderous script, poor acting, the chief complaints. Latter critic urged group to stick to An Evening of the Bohemian Theatre, which they have been continuing on week ends ...Concert version of Regina, produced for a single Sunday performance by YMHA Symphonic Workshop with members of the original Broadway cast, pleased Hawkins, WT&S, and Watt, News, as a high point of the season, while Rice, Post, sticks to argument that Blitzstein music didn't improve on Hellman original script for The Little Foxes.

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' Green Room Department '

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FREE ADVICE...Actors were warned to mind their manners while attending plays on Equity passes or this privilege will be revoked, pointed out "Equity Magazine"...NY Critics should start studying music, suggests the anonymous Spelvin, Theatre Arts, who wonders how long NY publishers are going to pay critics full time salary for working 90 nights per year.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...A new theatre or two, and a switch back of a 42nd Street movie to legit, expected in a few years by Morehouse, WT&S...Post drama department split on New Faces. Watts, Post, panned it, but Rice thinks physical elements and talents of youngsters outweighs sketch material...Poor singing voice of Jack Carson Of Thee I Sing, should give encouragement to other amateurs, notes NBC Pearson, Critic at Large.

BEST PLAYS...Dodd, Mean "Best Plays of 1951-52" edited by Chapman, News, will include: Barefoot in Athens, Gigi, I Am A Camera, Jane, Mrs. McThing, Point of No Return, Remains to be Seen, The Fourposter, The Shrike and Venus Observed. Mrs. McThing is Chapman's favorite, while his optimistic comment on season is "not too bad."

MAIL BOX...Playgoer who is willing to accept critics' comments without discovering merits of show for himself is just as much to blame for mediocre theatre as critics, Saturday Review reader agrees with Brown...Early curtain matinees to avoid the 5:00 PM rush hour trains, suggested by Morehouse, WT&S, correspondent.

COLUMN TIPS...London version of New Faces by Leonard Sillman in planning stages, hints Walker...Hot feud developed backstage at Pal Joey after numbers were reshuffled following Helen Woods exit, reports Kilgallen...Break of lifetime coming to young acting couple, Bob and Nancy Pascal, to be featured in Ladies Home Journal series, tips Winchell.

INTERVIEW HI-LITES...Jimmy Durante believes keeping up with the times vital to every actor, he told "Stage." Comic reads the critics because he may learn something from them, if they know their job...Famous first names of B.S.Pully, Guys and Dolls, revealed by Morehouse, WT&S, to be Bernard Shaw...Jack Waldron, Pal Joey bases his night club character on a former boss, he told Hawkins, WT&S.

BROADWAY TV THEATRE...Though trade paper TV reviewers have been complaining that scripts used on WOR TV Broadway TV Theatre five night a week series were dated, Crosby, Herald Tribune, has found a special charm in the rare vintage wine dispensed. The Fortune Hunter, written in 1909 by Winchell Smith, is the TV critic's favorite. The Great Divide, The Squaw Man and The Ticker suggested for future shows.

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' Theatre News Roundup '

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"Drama Desk" elected Rice, Post, president; Eaton, Press, vice president; and Kraus, Critical Digest, secretary...Allison, Herald Tribune, played lead in New Canaan, Conn, Town Players production of Three Men on a Horse...Gibbs, New Yorker, would like Roland Young and Vicki Cummings for his new play, Zolotow, Times, learns... Registration for American Theatre Wing's Summer Session under way...Ronny Graham, New Faces, doubles into Le Ruban Bleu, Eartha Kitt at Blue Angel...Jack Carter to sub for Phil Silvers, Top Banana, for four weeks starting July 21...John Connaughton replaces Sandy Kennedy in The King and I...Stalag 17 starts on nation-wide tour June 23 ...Brandt's Subway circuit will resume at Brooklyn Flatbush and Brighton, not at Bronx Windsor...Equity Library Theatre productions may tour next season...ABC TV sold Vanderbilt Theatre to Irving Maidman, realty investor...NY Supreme Court awarded $15,000 to Laszlo Halasz in his claim against NY City Center Company.

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' Scant Opportunities for Negro Actors '

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Thirteen Negro actors were employed in the 49 Broadway productions which played from September 1, 1951 to March 15, 1952, survey by Fred O'Neal in June "Equity Magazine" reveals. None had principal roles, and only two had speaking parts. Only seven of the 49 shows used any Negroes at all. Figures didn't include productions of Shuffle Along and Four Saints in Three Acts which opened after March 15.

Report which "Variety" tabs as "gloomy," reminds that no Negroes are employed as directors, stage managers, authors, composers, choreographers, musical directors, press agents, casting agents, company managers, stage hands, photographers, box office men, ticket brokers or theatre party agents. There is one Negro producer, one scenic designer, and one Negro in concert management. O'Neal reminds everyone in the theatre that there are people qualified in all these fields if the opportunities could be developed.

Actors Equity has been trying to do something about this problem. Last August 21 its Council adopted a statement calling for the integration of Negroes into dancing, acting, singing roles reflecting their participation in every day life. Committee from Actors Equity and League of NY Theatres met and several interesting propositions were made. Also a statement by various artist unions was formulated by Langston Hughes and Sidney Kingsley calling on theatre people to consider the Negro artist primarily as an artist, who should be given consideration for casting in any roles which his ability permits. Latter committee also noted in its statement that a well-intentioned but ill-directed sensitivity to the problem has worked to eliminate the Negro in servant and comedy roles which aren't caricatures.

Pollock, Compass, sees a hopeful sign in the mere fact that such committees have been formed and are acting, however slowly. The earnest folk of Equity and the other entertainment unions involved have plenty of work to do as the seasons roll by, the critic notes.

Survey pointed out that Negroes can be integrated into scripts easily, just as they have been integrated into the general pattern of American society. Negro policeman in Detective Story, several Negro children in Peter Pan, plus musical shows like On the Town, Inside USA and Out of this World where Negroes were part of the ensemble given as proof. These resulted in no violation of the naturalistic tradition of the theatre, the survey concludes. Instead, realism has been more faithfully served, it has advanced the interests of the theatre, and it has actually lent increased variety and excitement to the presentations.

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' Legit Stuff '

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Shows that closed include Of Thee I Sing...Wish You Were Here started three weeks of paid previews...Mrs. H. Alwyn Innes-Brown elected president of NY Chapter of ANTA.

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THEATRE FANS DRAMA STUDENTS TEACHERS

ACTORS ANGELS

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